



Health report

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Teens choose banding to fight flab

SCHOOLGIRL Nicola Catts knew gastric banding surgery was "a bit extreme" for someone her age, but she felt she had no other choice.

Although Nicola was aged only 16 when she underwent Lap-Band surgery, she is not unique. An increasing number of Australian teenagers are choosing to undergo the weight-loss procedure in a desperate bid to shed kilograms.

Nicola, who was 110 kilograms before her surgery last December, said: "I've done just about everything. I've done all the dieting. Probably stuff that is not too good for you."

The Lap-Band works by limiting the amount of food the stomach can hold.

The adjustable silicon band is wrapped around the upper part of the stomach, creating a small pouch and it can be adjusted by adding or removing saline. It allows patients to feel full sooner by slowing the rate of food passing through the small pouch to the larger and lower part of the stomach.

Laurent Layani, Nicola's surgeon at the Sydney Institute for Obesity Surgery, said the Lap-Band implant was appealing to younger patients. The youngest person Dr Layani has operated on was 13.

"It's almost inevitable that we were going to see more adolescents inquiring about this type of surgery," he said.



NO CHOICE: Nicola Catts was 16 when she had Lap-Band surgery. Picture: DANIELLE SMITH

"I think if an adolescent is mature enough and they have a strong family support, you can argue the case.

"Quite frankly I don't have any particular objection to do this if I really feel that it is going to be for the benefit of the 15- or 16-year-old."

Childhood obesity rates worldwide are rising at such a dangerous rate that in Britain the public health system - the NHS - is

preparing to offer gastric banding and stomach stapling to children as young as 14.

The Australian Sports Commission estimates that by 2020, 30 per cent of all children will be classified as overweight or obese.

Obesity Surgery Society of Australia and New Zealand president Harry Frydenberg said that even though the Lap-Band device was

gaining popularity among the young, surgery should be a last option for morbidly obese teens.

Nicola, the daughter of Peter Catts, the chairman of Independent Private Hospitals of Australia, has lost 13 kilograms since her operation.

"I can eat and be satisfied," she said. "It's so much less than what I used to eat.

"I've been going to the gym as well. I can get on the treadmill and walk for half an hour and not feel like dying."

Meanwhile, a Newspoll survey has found that Australian women believe happiness and kindness, not professional and financial success, can boost a woman's self-esteem.

Dr Jenny O'Dea, an expert in body image from University of Sydney, said the results, compiled for Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, were encouraging.

But despite the statistics, O'Dea said Australian women were still trying to ascribe to the stereotype of the "white, perfect skin ideal of beauty".

O'Dea supports weight-loss operations, such as Lap-Band surgery, for health reasons but not for cosmetic reasons.

"It's when medicine crosses the line of fashion that I find it appalling and inappropriate," she said.

GOOD NEWS

PARENTS with disruptive teenage children, take note. UK researchers found youngsters who took daily supplements of fish oils for three months had longer concentration spans and were calmer. The study showed children aged 12 to 15 were kinder and less impulsive towards their parents. Lead investigator Dr Madeleine Portwood said the trials were conducted within a group of students with persistent behavioural problems.

BAD NEWS

POOR diet could adversely affect asthma sufferers.

A study by Hunter Medical Research Institute researchers revealed that reducing the intake of antioxidants, such as fruit and vegetables, resulted in worsening lung function in people with asthma. Researcher Lisa Wood said they will now investigate whether asthma symptoms are alleviated by increasing the intake of particular antioxidant-rich foods.